

Getting Off on the Right Foot

Footcare Tips

A lot of walking every day is good for the body and good for the soul – but how about for the soles? You can help prevent the potential aches, pains, and blisters of long-distance walking with this sensible footcare advice.

Stop blisters before they happen

The secret to avoiding a serious blister is to stop walking as soon as you feel any pinching, rubbing, or other uncomfortable sensation against your foot. If you find a pebble or piece of dirt, remove it. If your sock is bunched up, smooth it out. If your feet are sweaty and sliding in your shoes, let them dry. Apply a Band-Aid to any red spots, and if more padding is needed, attach a layer of moleskin over the Band-Aid.

Avoid leg cramps

Occasionally, when legs and feet get a heavy workout, a muscle may lock into a sustained contraction, otherwise known as a spasm or cramp. The exact cause remains a mystery, but it may be related to dehydration, overexertion, or an electrolyte imbalance. To help prevent leg cramps:

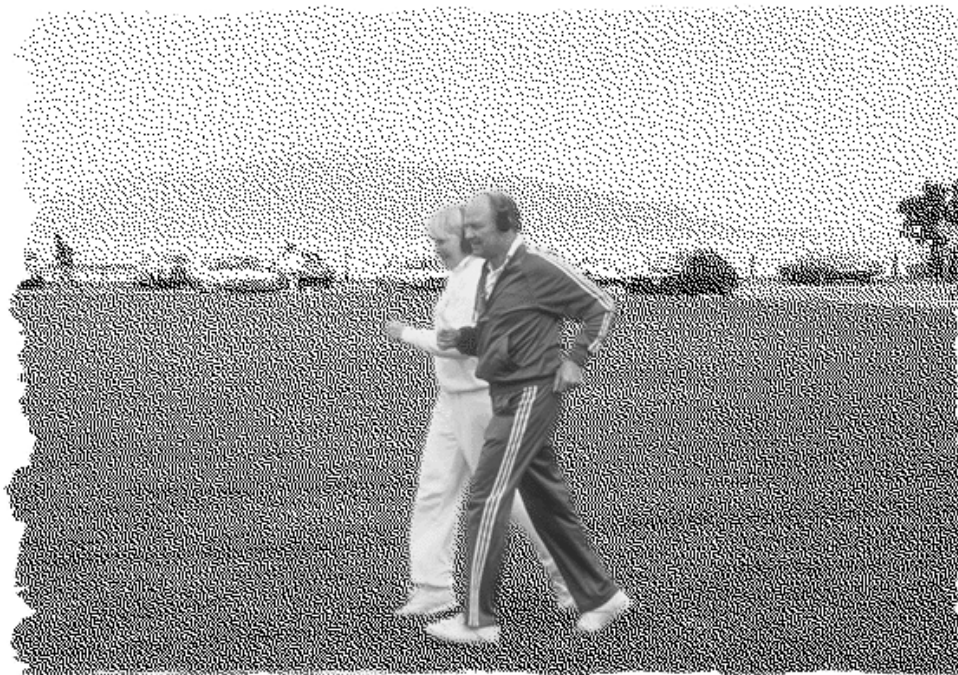
- Take at least 5 minutes before and after exercise to stretch your muscles
- Train properly with shorter, less-exerting hikes before taking a long, strenuous one
- Drink plenty of fluids – either water or a sports drink that helps balance the body's electrolytes.

Wear a good-fitting shoe

The right shoe can make all the difference. Visit a store that specializes in walking and running shoes – not just a general purpose sporting goods store – and ask a fitting expert for advice. Take into account how far and

how fast you'll be walking, your stride length and walking style, the walking surface, and your weight. If you'll be walking on uneven surfaces, consider walking boots for added sturdiness and ankle support. If you suffer from overpronation (one sign is your soles getting worn down on the inside), ask about motion control shoes or stability shoes.

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Getting Off on the Right Foot (Continued)

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Consider shoe inserts

People with overly high or low arches or other abnormalities can suffer from foot fatigue, strain, or pain during long walks – and so can anyone with normal feet who walks long distances. Shoe inserts, otherwise known as footbeds, insoles or orthotics, can make your shoes more comfortable and better fitting. They also can lessen wear and tear on your joints and limit blisters. The main choices in shoe inserts are:

- Simple, flat cushions available over the counter, usually for under \$15. These pad your feet to limit stress while preventing slippage.
- Molded orthotics, either custom-made or over the counter. These have heel cups, arch supports, or other features to correct imbalances, make foot movements more efficient, and enhance circulation.

If the Shoe Fits ...

When trying on walking shoes in the store:

- Aim for support, flexibility, and comfort.
- Wear the socks and shoe inserts you expect to wear while walking.
- Try on shoes later in the day or right after walking, since feet tend to swell over time as you walk.
- Make sure the shoes feel just right – don't expect comfort to improve once they're "broken in." Not too wide or narrow; no rough spots, slipping, pinching, or rubbing that could lead to blisters. While you're standing on the ball of your foot, your toes should have room to spread out.

- Twist and bend the shoes while you're not wearing them; inflexible shoes can cause legs and feet to become fatigued quickly.

Resources

- See the comprehensive shopper's guide to walking shoes at About.com/www.walking.about.com.



"Before you insult someone, walk a mile in their shoes. Then when you call them something, you're a mile away and you have their shoes."

– Author unknown